China Council Report

Newsletter of the China Council of The Asia Society

中国委员会通讯

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Regional China Councils Meet in Missouri

The first conference of Regional China Councils was held November 10-12, 1977 in the scenic foothills of the Ozark Mountains, to the southwest of St. Louis, Missouri. The conference was hosted by the Missouri China Council, and brought together representatives from seven Regional Councils (Colorado, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, Seattle, Southern Arizona, and Texas). Observers from Ohio (which has since organized a Council cosponsored by Ohio State University), Hawaii, and Michigan also joined the group of thirty-five.

The opening session on how to improve newspaper, radio, and television coverage of China was led by Charles Bailey of the Minneapolis Tribune, Jeff Rosenberg of National Public Radio, Svein Gilje of the Seattle Times, and Robert Oxnam, program director of the China Council. With considerable insight and humor they offered advice on how to provide services to the print and broadcast media. Almost all of the Regional Councils have included media representatives as members of their advisory boards.

Community, university, and staff persons from each of the Regional China Councils gave progress reports and several presented recently completed projects. Such projects included the "Missouri Guide to Resources on Asia," an essay and photo display on the Chinese in Texas, and a slide/tape presentation on health care in China sponsored by the Texas China Council. Another highlight was an introduction to locally produced videotapes by John and Mary Israel of the University of Virginia.

Although each China Council has its distinctive regional character, the Regional Councils as a whole share several mutual interests. The Texas project on Chinese-Americans has inspired similar projects in Southern Arizona and Colorado. Councils in Colorado, Missouri, and North Carolina are planning major conferences on Chinese agriculture, science and technology. And Missouri, Seattle, Minnesota, North Carolina, and Ohio have initiated inventories of resources on China and Asia available in their regions.

Several Councils are planning programs in cooperation with their local art museums. The Texas Council developed a variety of programs in conjunction with an exhibit of Han-T'ang murals from the PRC in late 1977-78, and Southern Arizona will cosponsor an exhibit of Asian art at the Tucson Museum of Art in early 1978.

The Regional Council Conference concluded with small-group discussions of three thematic topics -- values and art in China (led by Shirley Sun, director of the Chinese Culture Center in San Francisco), Chinese economic development (led by Michael Witunski of the Missouri China Council), and Chinese and American mutual perceptions (led by Robert Oxnam).

Harding Reviews First Year Without Mao

Not long after the death of Mao Tse-tung, during a visit to the PRC in the autumn of 1976, Harry Harding watched cheerful throngs of Chinese celebrate the downfall of the "Gang of Four" in Peking and Shanghai.

One year later, Professor Harding, who teaches Chinese politics at Stanford University, assessed the meaning of these momentous events in a China Council briefing packet written for American journalists. His analysis was accompanied by a 1500-word summary of the longer essay, an innovation suggested by Council associate Bill Hosokawa of the Denver Post.

In "China: The First Year Without Mao," Harding describes the "more pragmatic, conciliatory, and institutionalized" style of the post-Mao political order, but cautions that there are limits to "moderation" in China. He suggests that Hua Kuo-feng's emphasis on production and "comprehensive modernization" is more anti-Cultural Revolution than it is anti-Mao.

The approaches of an earlier Mao -- the Mao of the middle 1950s -- have been resurrected and synthesized with the Mao of the Cultural Revolution (1966-68). "The earlier Mao's concern with economic modernization and political stability has thus tempered the later Mao's interest in 'continuing the revolution' and promoting egalitarianism."

The Harding packet, which was sent to over 150 journalists and news organizations in the United States and abroad, resulted in many positive reactions and considerable press coverage.

Joseph Needham Speaks in New York

On his first trip to the United States in many years, Joseph Needham spoke in New York this past summer at The Asia Society. His two talks, hosted by the China Council, concerned China's place in the historical development of world science and technology. The eminent British historian was accompanied by his principal collaborator, Lu Gwei-djen.

The seventy-seven year old Needham, who is chief editor and author of a monumental seven volume work, Science and Civilization in China, has proved conclusively that Chinese technology and science were far in advance of the West in many fields until perhaps the late nineteenth century. With great wit and erudition, Dr. Needham described the inventions of printing, gunpowder, the magnetic compass, suspension bridges, mechanical clockworks, and biological control of insect pests as examples. The Cambridge-based scholar's most recent publication concerns the development of Chinese chemistry.

The China Council sponsors a continuing series of programs at Asia House in New York City. During the past year, topics included Sino-American trade, biomedical education and research in China, recent Chinese politics, and music and the performing arts. In April 1977 at Asia House the Academy of American Poets presented a colloquium, supported by the Luce Foundation, on "Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination."

Plans for 1978 include programs on Chinese art and archaeology, the Chinese-American experience, fortune-telling, U.S.-China relations, and events in conjunction with the summer 1978 Asia House Gallery exhibit on photography in China, 1850-1912.

Chinese and American Mutual Perceptions

Despite the improvement in U.S.-China relations since 1972, complex, often conflicting sets of images persist on both sides of the Pacific. Earlier hostile perceptions still continue, often in more subtle forms, side by side with the newer images derived from Sino-American rapprochement and exchanges.

Businessmen, education experts, journalists, and scholars gathered at the Johnson Foundation's Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin during mid-September to assess mutual perceptions and suggest a variety of public education programs to be undertaken by the China Council. Comments by Erica Jen, a Chinese-American who reflected on Chinese perceptions of Americans in light of her eighteen months as a student at Peking University in 1972-73, provided one of the meeting's high points.

A number of projects are now under way, including three photographic and oral history studies of the regional experiences of Chinese-Americans, sponsored by Regional China Councils in Texas, Arizona, and Colorado. The Council is also cosponsoring a program with UCLA's University Extension Program in Los Angeles on January 21, 1978 on how images and perceptions of China have been formed and how they have changed since the advent of ping-pong diplomacy. Organized by Professor Richard Baum, the one-day program is entitled "Oriental Despotism or People's Paradise: Will the Real China Please Stand Up?"

Another mutual perceptions project being sponsored by the China Council is a stimulating audio-visual presentation of Chinese and American images of each other from newspaper cartoons, magazines and movies. This project is being developed by Professor Donald Gillin of Vassar College.

Long range plans for this thematic project include the development of a resource packet, public opinion polls on American attitudes toward the Chinese, national and regional conferences on mutual perceptions, articles and programs for the print and broadcast media, and an update of Irv Drasnin's 1972 CBS production "Misunderstanding China."

"The Voice of America," from a Chinese periodical published during the Korean War.

Kettering Foundation Announces Grant

The Charles F. Kettering Foundation of Dayton, Ohio has awarded a grant of $27,500 to support the China Council thematic project on "The Chinese Developmental Experience and Its Global Implications." The project will focus special attention on Chinese agricultural and industrial development and will explore possible implications for other developing countries.

Under the Kettering grant, the China Council will develop a wide range of public education programs and publications. Regional China Councils in Missouri, North Carolina, and Colorado are now organizing conferences on various aspects of the developmental theme. Nationally, a pilot effort on Chinese agriculture is underway, involving A. Doak Barnett of the Brookings Institution, James P. Grant of the Overseas Development Council, and Robert Dernberger of the University of Michigan.

In developing programs, the China Council will collaborate closely with the Stanford University U.S.-China Relations Program, which has become a major center for the study of Chinese science and technology. The Council will also work closely with other organizations including the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the PRC and the National Council on U.S.-China Trade.

Cooperative Ventures Across the Country

What do the people of Pittsburgh, Norfolk, Milwaukee, Boston, Dallas, and San Francisco have in common? Over the course of 1977, The Asia Society's China Council cosponsored conferences on China in these and seven other cities across the nation.

Several of these conferences provided forums for detailed public discussion of Sino-American relations which contributed to the book Dragon and Eagle -- United States-China Relations: Past and Future (New York: Basic Books, 1978). Such collaborative programs have been useful in developing thematic projects, exploring potential regional council sites, and assisting areas which lack sufficient local resources to develop public programming on China. Symposia have introduced China to new audiences through print and broadcast media coverage, follow-up publications, and workshops for teachers, business people, and other special interest groups.

During the past year, San Francisco hosted a major conference on "Chinese Development and the Global Implications" in June and Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York organized a gathering on "The Chinese Woman" in December. A program in New Haven, Connecticut surveyed the results of scientific, business, and cultural exchanges between this country and the PRC.

This series of thirteen conferences has been developed in collaboration with major universities, chambers of commerce, public libraries, and world affairs councils. Businessmen have discussed prospects for U.S.-China trade, political analysts have described the succession to Mao, and historians have reviewed America's relationship with Taiwan. Noted China scholars have joined forces with local experts, including Dr. Michael E. DeBakey, the noted heart surgeon who reported on Chinese science and medicine at a Houston conference in April 1977, to better inform the American public about Chinese culture, society, and politics.

Lardy Surveys China's Economy

In a briefing packet distributed to the press by the China Council last summer, Nicholas Lardy predicted that the Chinese economy would improve during the late 1970s, after a series of setbacks during the period 1974-76.

Professor Lardy, a Yale economist who specializes on China, concludes that the serious decline in Chinese economic output, particularly in industry, will be temporary. The latest reports indicate that industrial production is indeed on the rebound, but that the fall harvest was somewhat disappointing.

Although some economists have seen the 1974-76 economic decline as symptomatic of long term structural problems, Lardy ascribes China's difficulties to shorter term factors. He points, in particular, to political disruptions after Chou En-lai's death in January 1976 and the massive earthquake which leveled the major industrial city of Tangshan in July 1976. Given political stability, Lardy feels that the PRC economy should recover its previous high growth rate and enjoy "perhaps sustained rapid growth through at least the rest of the decade."

New Publication

DRAGON AND EAGLE -- United States-China Relations: Past and Future, edited by Michel Oksenberg and Robert B. Oxnam (New York: Basic Books, 1978), $13.50.

This comprehensive assessment of Sino-American relations is a result of the China Council's first thematic project. Dragon and Eagle is available through the Council to its members, associates, and Regional Council members at a 40% discount (prepaid; N.Y. State residents add 8% tax).

Values Project Moves Forward

The generous support of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund has enabled the China Council to move ahead with its "Values and Revolution in Modern China" project. The Rockefeller Brothers Fund grant of $25,000, announced in October 1977, will be matched in full by the National Endowment for the Humanities, as are grants from the Henry Luce, Rockefeller, and General Services Foundations.

The Asia Society's China Council is developing this thematic project on several fronts, including the following:

*a major book of essays on various aspects of Chinese life, culture, ideology, and law entitled How Different Are the Chinese? (to be published by Harper & Row in late 1978).

*a variety of Regional China Council projects combining public education programs with art or photographic exhibits (Arizona, Texas, Colorado, Seattle, Ohio, Missouri).

*assistance to stations of the Public Broadcasting System and to National Public Radio in developing special programming concerning life and values in China.

*plans for several publications, including a single author book and a variety of articles for high-circulation magazines, focusing on various expressions of values in modern and contemporary China.

*plans for an exhibit of twentieth century Chinese painting which would travel around the country and be complemented by slides, films, and television treatment.

Ross Terrill of Harvard University, the China Council's first Research Fellow, is coordinating the Values project.

At a November meeting in New York of the authors of the Harper & Row volume, Professor Terrill, who is editing the work, outlined the questions to be confronted in coming to terms with value change in China: "China has in our century undergone great convulsion and appears to live by norms quite different from those of its 3000 year long past. What are these norms? Where do they come from?...Do Chinese values share any common ground with our own? In a shrinking world are Americans and Chinese going to be able to understand and respect each other's values; or do we grow apart in this realm precisely as we become objectively interdependent?"

Poll Examines U.S.-China Relations

A majority of Americans (62%) now favor establishing full diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. But if breaking relations with Taiwan is a condition for "normalizing" relations with the PRC, 47% of Americans would find this unacceptable.

These are among the central findings of a Potomac Associates poll conducted by the Gallup Organization in April 1977. The results, released just before Secretary of State Vance's visit to China in August 1977, underscore public ambivalence on China policy and the importance of Taiwan as the final obstacle to establishing full relations with the PRC, the stated goal of the 1972 Shanghai Communique.

The poll also shows that most Americans are poorly informed about Taiwan and China. Two-thirds of those polled knew that the government on the mainland of China is communist, but only 44% knew that Taiwan has a noncommunist government.

William Watts, Ralph Clough, and Robert Oxnam comment on the survey and provide useful background information on Sino-American relations in The United States and China: American Perceptions and Future Alternatives. This pamphlet offers a concise review of recent history, including considerable discussion of Taiwan, and outlines policy options now facing the Carter administration.

The China Council assisted in developing this poll and major financial support came from the Rockefeller Foundation. The pamphlet is available from Potomac Associates, School of Advanced International Studies, 1740 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, at $4 each or $3 for multiple orders.

UCLA Drasnin
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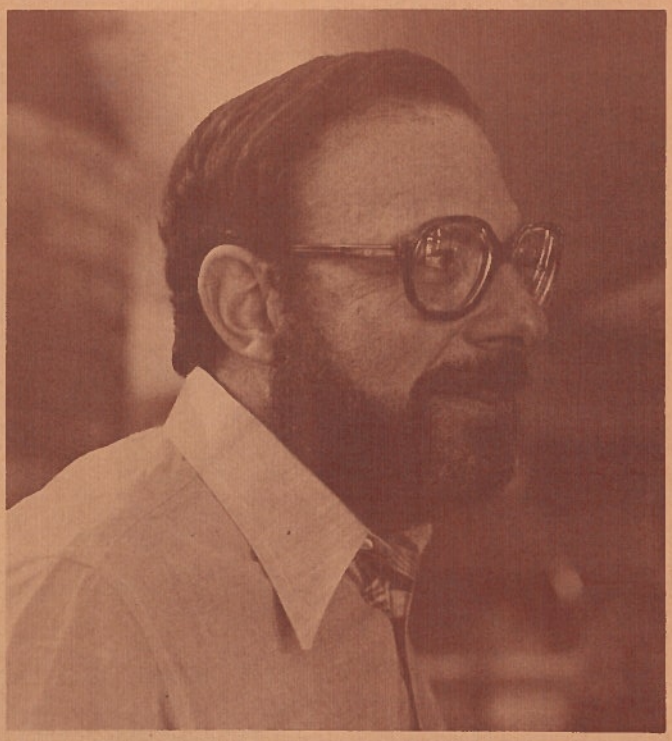
Drasnin Becomes China Council Research Fellow

Irv Drasnin, documentary producer for CBS television, will serve as a Research Fellow of The Asia Society's China Council during 1978. Drasnin's film "Misunderstanding China," which was broadcast on the eve of Nixon's arrival in Peking in 1972, is a classic study of Hollywood's images and stereotypes of the Chinese. In 1973, Drasnin traveled to the PRC to direct and produce the CBS documentary "Shanghai."

As Research Fellow, Drasnin will assist the China Council in developing new audio-visual materials and in improving broadcast media coverage of China. He will advise and consult on specific media projects being developed both nationally and regionally.

Irv Drasnin is originally from California and now lives in New York City. He attended UCLA (he is an avid Bruins fan) and did graduate work in Asian Studies at Harvard. He has been an active member of the China Council since 1975.



Irv Drasnin, Producer, CBS News

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